

Hampstead Garden Suburb

Heath Extension – Area D

Character Appraisal



BARNET
LONDON BOROUGH

HAMPSTEAD - GARDEN - SUBURB - TRUST

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Character appraisal

Section 1 Background historical and architectural information

1.1 Location and topography

The Heath Extension lies at the southern edge of the Conservation Area. The 125 acres of open space lie outside the area covered by the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust Scheme of Management but are crucial to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area as a whole. The land consists of most of the former agricultural land of Spaniards Farm and Wyldes Farm. The Heath Extension is bordered on its southern side by Hampstead Way and Wildwood Road, on its eastern side by Wildwood Road, with the Great Wall enclosing the north-west side.

1.2 History

Spaniards Farm was part of Hornsey Park, owned by the Ecclesiastical Commission, who in 1890 re-organised their farm holdings, reducing the land at Spaniards Farm to 83 acres; Bishops Wood and Turner Wood were retained by the Commission and the land was leased to George Metcalfe.

Wyldes Farm lay to the west of Spaniards Farm. It came under threat with the arrival of the deep tunnelled underground line to Hampstead. The proposal was to extend the line to a station at the Bull and Bush. The owners of Wyldes Farm were Eton College and they had thought to develop the land. Dame Henrietta Barnett had a house at the top of the hill (see Spaniards End Area Appraisal) which she and Canon Barnett used as a country retreat. Dame Henrietta was appalled by the idea of the loss of the fields and views and her immediate reaction was the organisation of the Hampstead Heath Extension Council to protect the land from the disfiguring effects that she considered had blighted various other suburbs of London. This was after all the view painted by Millais in 1848, titled "Landscape, Hampstead".

This painting shows Wyldes Farmhouse in its rural agricultural surroundings. All this was about to be lost; the farm would become the car park for the station and the fields would be built over. In 1903 Dame Henrietta mobilised a formidable group of gentlemen – Eton being unwilling to negotiate with a lady – and, in 1907, 80 acres was finally purchased; £17,500 being provided by the Heath Extension Society and £18,500 by the London County Council. This was to be the Heath Extension and would preserve the open land and view. And so the idea of the Hampstead Garden Suburb grew out of the Heath Extension with the remainder of the Wyldes Estate being purchased by the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust.



1. One of the four main elements in Unwin's layout was the visual "capture" of the commanding heights on which the central squares and public buildings were erected, divided from the Heath Extension by the dramatic boundary of the Great Wall with which Unwin brilliantly separated the urban centre of the Suburb from the rural landscape of the fields and hedgerows of the Heath Extension ([Photograph 1](#)).

But for the First World War, the Great Wall should have reached Wildwood Road. The Great Wall running along the north-east edge of the Heath Extension is suggestive of German precedents, especially from mediaeval Rothenberg and Nuremberg, which Parker and Unwin so greatly admired. “The aspects of the mediaeval German town gave nourishment for the romantic sentiments of the cool, organising Englishman”.

1.3 Status and management

For many years the Heath Extension was managed as part of Hampstead Heath by the London County Council and its successor, the Greater London Council (GLC). In 1989, following the demise of the GLC, the City of London took over responsibility for the Heath and the Heath Extension.

The City of London's Hampstead Heath Management Plan covers general policy objectives and proposals relating to the management of Hampstead Heath for the period 2007 to 2017. This plan is the first of three parts which together will detail the management of the Heath in this period. The plan develops policies and proposals established in earlier management documents produced by the City of London.

Annual work plans are produced which reflect the primary objectives set out in the Mission Statement and broadly cover all conservation issues including vegetation management, pond and wetland management, and footpath maintenance and fencing works. The annual work plans will be based upon detailed plans for individual areas which will be developed progressively. Area plans and the annual work plan will be drawn together in consultation with local groups and other interested parties. The importance of ongoing consultation, including site meetings, is recognised and consideration will be given to the means of providing regular information.

Hampstead Heath is one of the most important areas of open space within London, providing a priceless resource of ecosystems, landscapes, history and recreational and sporting facilities. As part of the Heath, the Heath Extension is enjoyed and used by people from all over London and from a wide area of the country as a whole – and the use is increasing. This rising popularity, in terms of visitors and usage, poses the most significant threat to the natural aspect of the Heath and presents an important challenge in management terms.

Section 2 Character of the area

General

The most distinctive aspect of the Heath Extension is the retention, to a very large extent, of the former field pattern of Wyldes Farm. The hedgerows are a major landscape feature dividing the large space into a series of green 'rooms', each of which has a distinctive character. There is a wide variety of habitat on the Heath Extension, including bramble and thistle, hazels and hollies, hawthorn hedges, native black poplar along with flora and habitat for Odonata (dragonflies and damselflies) on the banks of the ponds. There are many field trees, for example, elder, field maple, and good examples of boundary oaks.

Although there are two small sections of tarmac path, the main track running from the southern boundary down to the cluster of maintenance buildings in the centre of the Extension is a roughly gravelled farm track. Other paths are also lightly gravelled and informal, and the area, although mown, is not manicured; it is definitely an open space rather than a park.



There are no buildings of significance on the site. However, the Grecian Fountain has been listed by the Secretary of State as Grade II ([Photograph 2](#)). Though not a building, the Great Wall drawn by Charles Paget Wade for Unwin is an important edifice with decorative pavilions and gazebos which form part of the long panoramic views northwards towards buildings of Central Square and Lutyens' romantic skyline ([Photograph 3](#)). The different areas of the Heath Extension based on the old fields are described below, running from north to south.

Bush Field and Shirk Mead



Along the northern boundary a path runs alongside the great wall, past the pavilions, some of which are in a poor state of repair ([Photograph 4](#)). Halfway along the path the Great Wall is stepped back to form a terraced gateway with shallow steps leading to Heathgate and framing the axial view of St. Jude's and its spire. Along each side of the terrace, gazebos with seating provide sheltered areas from

which to enjoy the views. Bush Field is now a rugby pitch, well used in winter. In summer, both old fields are open mown areas.

Barn Field and Patrick's Field

The only lit path across the Heath Extension runs from east to west along the boundaries of these fields. It provides a route leading towards Corringham Road and on through to Golders Green Tube. From here there are views of the back of Parker and Unwin houses in Wildwood Road, with their summer sleeping balconies. Barn Field has three cricket pitches and practice cricket nets which are well maintained. The pitches are very popular and used for local league matches. Football is played on a rough pitch in Patrick's Field.

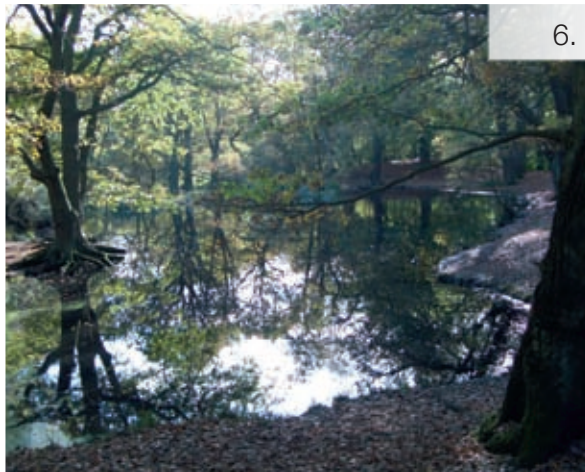
Hill Field and Pond Field

Up the hill to the south, on the western side there is an open slope providing fabulous views over St. Jude's to the hills beyond ([Photograph 5](#)). The view to the west is dominated by the chimneys of Heathgate which look striking, particularly in winter as they tower above the trees.



On the eastern side lie seven ponds, all man made. The lower pond is thought to be over 250 years old, the other six were dug in 1908-08 by the unemployed. The ponds are fed from run-off, predominantly from Sandy Heath, the water being channelled under the road and thence into the top pond.

Today they are marvellously wild, hidden by huge swathes of flowers in the summer, including ragged robin, wild irises, bull rushes and even blackberries (Photograph 6). A variety of ducks and birds, including herons, use the ponds and in some years there is a population of mandarin ducks. In a survey in 2007, ten species of dragonflies and damselflies were observed. Winding paths run through the trees and bushes around the ponds, which are can to be crossed by simple log bridges.



Upper Cart Field and Upper and Lower Weild Pightle

At the top of the extension there are open wildflower meadows running up to Wildwood Road. The Grecian Fountain is situated by the cart track which runs through the centre of the Heath Extension. Upper Weild Pightle is enclosed by trees and hedges and frequently used in the summer as an informal sports field and play area for schools and clubs. In Lower Weild Pightle, there is an enclosed play area which is specifically provided for the use of parents with very young children (Photograph 7). It provides a secure, dog free environment for the children.

The Heath Extension is very well used for almost every kind of outdoor recreational activity.- jogging, walking, ballgames, children's football practice, and the serene enjoyment of the space by those resting on the many wooden benches provided in memory of individuals who, in their lifetimes, loved this place. The tranquil air of this part of the Suburb encourages many people, especially young families and couples, who will often be found in the summer time picnicking in the various enclaves. Commercial dog walking is very common on the Heath and some attempt has been made to regulate the numbers of dogs one person can be in charge of. The area is still well used by people walking their own dogs (Photograph 8 - see overleaf).



There is a designated ride on the Heath Extension which is not a bridleway (Photograph 9). The ride is used but the demand for horse riding is low and there are no plans to extend the present network.

For such a well used amenity, there is surprisingly little litter and the area is well looked after by the City of London Corporation.



